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# Neoliberal Occupation: Framing the Israeli J14 Movement Collective Identity by State Bureaucracy

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The Israeli J14 movement of summer 2011 was part of a global protest wave which demanded social justice on behalf of "the people". Due to diverse social composition, the claims of the protestors were inclusive, so as to build a wide collective identity that would comprise under a single movement the different ethno-classes in Israel. However, state bureaucrats framed the movement's collective identity and translated its claims in narrow terms. This framing process excluded from the movement's collective identity specific social groups that did not fit into the mold of the "normative" and "worthy" subject that was constructed by the Trachtenberg committee. The framing of the J14 movement collective identity served as a mechanism which enabled the Trachtenberg committee to advance Israeli neoliberalism both at the subjectification and policy levels.

**Key words:** neoliberal co-optation, social movements outcomes, Occupy movements, collective identity, policy construction.

The Israeli J14 movement was part of a global protest wave beginning in North Africa and the Middle East and shortly spreading over to Europe, Israel and the United States. Protestors around the globe used the repertoire of occupying the public space objecting to the local expressions of the expansion of inequality and the violation of democratic principles. The global protest wave has led many researchers to investigate the phenomena that re-flamed their optimistic critical imagination regarding social change and even revolution.

Major part of the research conducted about the Occupy movements dealt with the structural reasons that led to the outburst of these protests pointing out to neoliberal governance and anti-democratic politics as the main catalysators of the massive uprisings (Alimi 2012; Benski et al. 2013; della Porta 2012; Grinberg 2013; Langman 2013; Moghadam 2013; Perugorria and Tejerina 2013; Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013). Much like in the American and European Occupy movements, the Israeli J14 movement was the product of the changes in Israeli political economy in the past three decades. The protestor's claims challenged the Israeli neoliberal discourse, especially the close relationship between capital and state (Ram and Filc 2013).

Most researchers deduced that the local social, political and historical context had a substantial influence on the formation of the demands and repertoire of the different Occupy movements (Baumgarten 2013; Rosenhek and Shalev 2013; Tejerina et al. 2013; Uitermark and Nicholls 2012). Yet, there were common repertoires within the ranks of the different Occupy Movements. The most well-known repertoire was the occupation of the public space by building tent cities (Harvey 2012; Tejerina et al. 2013) and experimenting with participatory democracy techniques (della Porta 2012; Dhaliwal 2012; Maeckelbergh 2012). Other common repertoires that characterized the Occupy Movements were civil disobedience and non-violent resistance (Gitlin 2012; Hammond 2015), mobilization through online social networks (Gabay and Caren 2012; Gamson and Sifry 2013; Rushkoff 2013; Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Vicari 2013) and generating new forms of protesting such as internet petitions, digital hacktivism (Cottle and Lester 2011) and Mic Check (Constanza-Chock 2012).

Scholars who researched The demands of the Occupy movements showed that the protestor's claims were moving on an axis between concrete and broad demands, when the latter were focusing on social justice, inequality and democratization (Arditi 2012; Gitlin 2012; Juris 2012). In the Israeli case the demands of the J14 movement began with housing prices, but soon as the movement spread through Israeli cities and ethno-classes, the demands expanded to a wider range under the guise of "social justice" dealing with education, health care, social services, taxation and (un)employment. These broad demands reflected the diverse social composition of the J14 movement and encouraged the movement's leaders to build a wide collective identity that would comprise under a single movement the different ethno-classes in Israel. This was a complex task due to the economic, ethnic and geographic background of the J14 leaders. Indeed, most of the movement's leaders were young (future) middle-class Ashkenazim (descendants of European Jews) with academic certification living in Tel-Aviv. Although the J14 movement mobilized participants and supporters from varied socio-cultural backgrounds (Rozenhak and Shalev 2013), the characteristics of its leaders took over its collective identity within the mainstream journalism (Shevchenko 2015).

The Occupy movements posed an immediate threat to the political coalitions that were in power at the time. Some of the local governments responded to this threat by media censorship and blockage of the internet (Castells 2012), and by dismantling the tent cities under the argument that only the government has the legal legitimacy to use the public space to retrieve order (Harvey 2012). Along with these kind of responses, aimed to the immediate dismantle of the protests and consequently to emptying of the public space, other governmental responses framed the claims and practice of the protestors as illegitimate (Desrués 2013). In the Israeli case, the government tried to neutralize the J14

movement by ignoring the protestors and delegitimizing their claims (Gordon 2012), proceeding with moving to the forefront of the public discourse the perceived external threats to the Israeli nation (Grinberg 2014) and eventually establishing a committee which was given the mandate to meet the protestor's demands by "changing priorities in order to ease the economical burden of Israeli citizens" (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011:9).

In this paper, I will examine the Committee for Economic and Social Change, which also known as the Trajtenberg committee, as short-term outcomes of the J14 movement and as an external actor which framed the movement's collective identity. This committee represents an interpretive text which serves the purpose of diagnosing the claims and demands of the protestors. By conducting critical discourse analysis of the state's committee, I wish to unravel the frames and discourse through which the Trajtenberg committee interpreted the J14 movement's identity and claims. My main argument is that the committee report appropriated some of the protestors rhetoric and demands while translating them into a local neoliberal discourse which corresponded with Israeli state's socio-economic agendas.

This paper is composed of five parts. The first section will present a brief summary of what I call as "neoliberal occupation". In the second part I will review the literature of social movements outcomes in order to challenge the disconnection between the political and the cultural spheres. Through this section I will show that political outcomes actually represent cultural texts containing discourses, interpretation and representation of identities. In the third part I will introduce my analytical method – critical discourse analysis. The fourth part is the heart of this paper – the analysis of the committee report. This section is composed from three sub sections: introduction of the Trajtenberg committee; analysis of the ways in which the Trachtenberg report constituted the collective identity of the protest. Central to the constitution of the collective identity was the identification of the political subject of the protest and its relations to the market and the state. This division will serve me in the last part of this paper where I will discuss the relationship between political economy and identity politics along with the different dimensions of neoliberal occupation.

## Neoliberal Occupation

Neoliberalism is a political-cultural project, composed of various assumptions and outlooks that are revealed in different configurations in places where neoliberalism has been institutionalized (Clarke 2008). The various expressions, then, force the neoliberal project to deal with local mixtures of culture, politics, and civil society (Peck 2004). For example, in the Israeli case, neoliberalism fastened itself to the nationalistic discourse. As a result, in Israel, these two hegemonies became inseparable hence, criticizing one of these hegemonies is perceived as criticizing the other (Tzfadia 2012). These local mixtures reveal the fact that we cannot find one unifying "neoliberal" phenomena but rather many local *neoliberalisms*. Thus, if one would analyze the political economy in Israel, he or she should not address it as neoliberalism in Israel, but rather as Israeli neoliberalism.

While it appears that in the past three decades neoliberalism gained widespread sympathy around the world, civil opposition against its mechanisms and consequences indicate that public uprising, in some parts of the world, has already transpired (Kalb 2012). However, the flexibility of neoliberal practices allows it, in many instances, to translate and incorporate the discourse of opposition and resistance into its own language. In this very manner, for example, the neoliberal discourse injected itself into the left-wing of the rule of law (Ibid), into the discourse of social rights, equality and humanism (Centeno and Cohen 2012), and even successfully constructed a neoliberal feminism, which promotes the notion that a feminist is an entrepreneur that maintains a balance between family and career in the most optimal manner (Rottenberg 2013). These few examples point out to the capability of neoliberalisms to occupy not only the public space (Grinberg 2013; Ram and Filk 2013), but also our common sense. To put it in other words, neoliberalism has the abilities of "appropriation, articulation, and transformation [...] re-framing of existing radical and alternative discourses" (Clarke 2008: 140). Yet, these kinds of co-optations are conducted through the local cultural meanings, discourses, politics and hegemonies. The various ways in which neoliberalisms deal and cohabit with local mixtures of civil and political identities, and the various civil uprisings that oppose it, compel us to address the issue of identity politics with great vigor. The local resistances against neoliberal practices underline the inherent connection between political economy and identity groups. The diversity of every human society in which neoliberal reasoning penetrates—whether through state apparatus, subjectification of the neoliberal individual, or the establishment of neoliberalism as the normative discourse—produces, in turn, a unique form of reaction and resistance of the public or a particular sector of it.

## The political is cultural

Over the last two decades the research regarding social movement started to raise questions concerning the outcomes of collective action instead of looking for the reasons that led to the action itself. These outcomes were measured by the perceived successes and failures of the collective action (Oliver et al. 2003). Recently, the research began to move toward the investigation of consequences and effects of social movements that describe the ways in which the collective action effected or changed our social reality (Benski et al. 2013).

Social movements consequences are sorted by two dimensions: time dimension and social sphere dimension. Time sorts between short and long-term consequence. The second classification of consequences is sorted by the kind of

social sphere the collective action effects: political, cultural of biographical. Based on the assumption that the political field is completely separated from the cultural one, the central division in the second kind of sorting is between cultural and political consequences (Polletta 1997), resulting in the belief that they operate in two different realms within the collective action.

Researchers tend to pay more attention to political consequences due to their ability to quantify and measure this “species” of consequences, while the cultural ones are more complex and less quantifiable (Giugni, 1998, 2004, 2008; Earl, 2004). Political consequences have a variety of manifestations: policy change (mainly new legislation), effect on government's budgets, implementation of an existing or new policy, entrance of new political actors into state institutions and formation of alternative institution (Meyer 2004). Cultural consequences have a wider spectrum: on the individual level, social movements can ignite changes that effect people's individual beliefs and values (Earl 2004). Collective action has also a symbolic resonance within the society it wishes to change by distributing its culture and practice to the public (Guigni 2008). This sort of cultural consequences can be unraveled by examining changes in media coverage, popular culture (music, fashion, art etc.), academic writing and social networks. Finally, the interaction between social movement and the popular culture can give birth to new communities and sub-cultures (ibid). This kind of cultural consequences manifest themselves in the creation of new collective identities (Earl 2004).

The distinction between political and cultural consequences is well acknowledged in the literature of social movements outcomes, and yet such differentiation is somewhat artificial due to the semiotic dimension that every social action folds within itself. Realizing that the cultural and the political are embedded one within the other enables us to examine the ways in which state bureaucracy interprets the claims of J14 protestors and through that interpretation meets their demands. It is highly important to note that the interpretative aspect of social movements outcomes enables us to comprehend that these consequences are not the direct reflection of the protestor's claims and demands, and that they might partially meet or even contradict those claims (Walgrave and Vlieghehart, 2012). In order to understand how social movement consequences might deviate from the protestor's claims it is essential to bear in mind the ways in which policy makers, bureaucrats and politicians frame those claims.

The framing approach explains “framing” as a dynamic process that describes the negotiations and conflicts between social agents over the construction of reality by interpretation of daily life and by simplification of our social world (Benford and Snow 2000). The frames do not only fill our reality with meaning, they also construct certain realities as problematic and hence, as needed to be fixed (Snow 2004). Collective action entrepreneurs are known by using such framing processes to mobilize participants and supporters into their ranks and to gain media coverage (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). Similarly, state actors and decision makers are not located in an ideological or conceptual vacuum. As other social agents, they are shaping and simultaneously shaped by cultural perception, norms and collective identities. But, there is a significant difference between framing processes that are initiated by activists and those that are conducted by state bureaucrats: The framing done by policy makers is perceived as neutral and as unprejudiced. This is achieved through a certain means of persuasion that positions bureaucracy representatives as a universal group striving to realize the common good through rational-state means. One of the most significant expressions of this approach can be found in state committee texts and legal documents. These texts are written not only as a contribution to the knowledge of the state itself, but also reflect, and ultimately impose, a certain outlook maintained by the state that is controlled by its bureaucratic representatives. This outlook is presented under the guise of “the common good” and the public interest, while in fact it is attributed to the specific social position of those same bureaucrats (Bourdieu 1994). Despite the efforts to position themselves as a universal collective which its sole purpose is to achieve the common good, the decisions of state bureaucracy that we grasp as rational and as cost-effective, are actually absorbed with cultural meanings and interpretation (Goodwin 1994). Hence, political consequences, especially those that are manifested in policy and legal documents, represent cultural texts and not just an instrument that serves the purpose of achieving political goals.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

In this paper, I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) method to analyze the Trajtenberg committee report. CDA focuses on analyzation of texts and discourses while unraveling the ways in which the discursive practices preserves the social order and power relations within society (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). This kind of analysis challenges conventional politics by dismantling the language, identities and knowledge through which policy making processes take place (Feindt and Oels 2005).

One of the most important assumptions used in CDA is that social, cultural and structural processes are, at least partially, discursive. The discourse itself is simultaneously constructive and constructed (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). The discourse also has an “ideological effect”: it contributes to the creation and reproduction of power relations and inequality between social groups by discursive strategies of exclusion and inclusion (Meyer 2001; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Furthermore, the researcher must examine empirically the discourse and language of the text(s) within the social context it was produced (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996). In short, CDA method enables me to critically analyze the cultural assumption that are hidden within the discourse of Trajtenberg committee report and the political interests that are expressed by the report.

While analyzing policy reports one must pay close attention to the use of specific word and terms in conceptualization processes; description of the committee's target group(s); figure of speech and uses of metaphors to describe different phenomena; the framing processes of social problems and the use of cultural narratives to suggest solutions to the problems that were framed (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996). To put it in other words, the methodological purpose of CDA of policy is to dismantle what has been naturalized by policy makers.

By using CDA, the current analysis regards the Trajtenberg committee report as shaped by its embeddedness in the Israeli social structure and at the same time as an active actor that shapes and changes the social reality in Israel by the way in which it interprets the claims and demands of J14 movement. Hence, it is important not to look only for the language, words, concepts and categories within this text, it is also essential to consider the social position of the committee members and the interpretations that result from this position. The discourse that will be unraveled from the committee report will reveal a production of interpretational frames and knowledge by social agents who are perceived as specialist in their respective field.

## Trajtenberg Committee

The Committee for Economic and Social Change was appointed by Prime Minister Netanyahu in response to the wave of protest that erupted in Israel in the summer of 2011. The Committee's letter of appointment consisted of thirteen names<sup>2</sup> of experts appointed by Prime Minister Netanyahu at the recommendation of the committee's chairmen, Professor Manuel Trajtenberg. These experts hailed mainly from the field of economics. Their position in this field is significant for understanding their interpretation of the protest demands. Most of them were connected in one way or another to the state's fiscal bureaucracy, or to what Bourdieu called "the right hand of the neoliberal state" (Bourdieu 1998: 2). In other words, most committee members were technopols who viewed themselves as impartial economists. The main praxis of the technopols is to turn economists into politicians. However, in contrast to politicians who represent the interests of certain groups as well as their personal interests, technopols claim that their knowledge is neutral: an economic knowledge presented as apolitical that pertains to the broad public and the general good (Williamson 1994). Despite the technopols claims that they represent a non-ideological group, their growing power as a professional bureaucracy strips economic policy processes of their moral, social and political aspects.

## The Main Backbone of Israeli Society

A key characteristic of the J14 and other Occupy movements was the demand of "the people" for "social justice". Hence, the first task of the Trajtenberg committee was to define who are "the people" and what are their demands.

The first chapter of the Trajtenberg committee report described the eruption of J14 movement as a result of "economic distress of individuals and families from the backbone of Israeli society". The report describes this backbone as "young, educated working families with suitable employment qualifications struggling with the cost of living, housing costs and to ensure proper care and education for their small children". This description defines the Israeli young middle-class as the committee's target group by enumerating the characteristics of this social class: a generation that "walks and runs as it is expected to" and fights for the promise of a better future. Hence, the report deduces that "in their heart these families seriously doubt whether they will be able to secure their economic position in the foreseeable future" (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011:25). By defining who is included in the target group of the report, the Trajtenberg committee report determined who has the legitimacy to protest and who are the normative subjects of the J14 movement. Appropriately, the Trajtenberg committee report described one of the causes for the distress of the middle-class found in the

"deep sense of injustice [...] with respect to those who do not sufficiently take part in carrying the burden due to their limited participation in employment, [...] avoid serving the general public, particularly through army service [...] in large part poverty is a result of non-integration into the economy and society" (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011:25).

The committee report interprets the distress of the protestors as stemming from a double burden. On the one hand working to secure their future and that of their children, and on the other hand carrying the burden of those who do not participate in the labor market. The summarization the protestors' sense of injustice by the committee report sheds even more light to its definition of the unworthy subject: "poverty is perceived in part as voluntary and even exploitative, and therefore policy aimed at helping weak populations is partially and paradoxically perceived as unfair" (Ibid: 28). The committee report points to public conceptions that frame poverty as a product of free choice or unfair exploitation of collective resources. Consequently, the committee report goes on to say that "policy directed at weak populations is viewed in part as unfair". The committee report conveniently attributes this framing of the problem regarding the poor segments of Israeli society to the protestors. In doing so it can imply that its analysis and recommendations stem from its "acceptance" of the protestors' discourse. This rhetoric grants legitimacy to the absence of policy aimed at helping weakened populations. In other words, this interpretation justifies cuts in public spending for social welfare, while viewing the poor classes as those who do not *want* to contribute to society and to

the economy (Ram 1999; Clarke 2008), hence condemning poverty as a matter of choice. In accordance with such diagnosis of the Israeli middle-class problems, the committee's report solution suggested that

“increasing the rate of participation in the labor force, particularly among population groups with low participation rates, is one of the main instruments for increasing economic growth and also for reducing poverty and narrowing social gaps” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011:125).

Based on its view of poverty as resulting from lack of participation in the labor market, the main thrust of the proposed solution called for easing the burden on the middle-class by “encouraging” the unemployed to get up and find a job. Poverty in Israel, as in other societies, is not just a matter of pure class but it overlaps with ethnicity and national belonging. As collective identity scholars showed, identifying who is included in the “normative circle” is not enough. During the identification processes, a clear line is drawn between those who are considered as part of the inner circle and those who are excluded and hence, are framed as the “others” and “outsiders” of that inner circle (Gamson 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Tilly 1998). In the context of Trajtenberg committee report, this “otherness” was framed by the close connection between poverty and religious and national identity:

“An analysis of the participation and employment rates of population groups in Israel shows that the low participation and employment rates in Israel stem to a large extent from the participation and employment rates of two population groups: Jewish ultra-orthodox men and women from the minorities sector” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011:125).

The solution proposed by the committee to encourage participation of these “non-productive” Israelis in the labor market is a national program aimed at removing barriers, particularly programs that will enable their full integration in the workforce (see Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 126-132). The proposal in the committee report assumes that these sectors suffer from barriers that are in fact personal failures, a sort of moral vacuum that does not enable individuals in these sectors to become fully integrated into Israeli society (Helman 2014). The integration into Israeli society will be successful once the Jewish ultra-orthodox men and the Arab minority (especially women) will turn into market citizens (Newman 2011). These populations are candidates for integration into the labor market because only then will they become “responsible” citizens that take part in accelerating economic growth by internalized the principles of the market and are therefore motivated by practices of competition and entrepreneurship (Takeyama 2008; Springer 2010). The central idea underlying this practice is that participation in the labor market is the best and most efficient way to extract these sectors from poverty, while proving that they are good and worthy citizens by the mere fact that they actively enter the labor market (Helman 2014). This kind of public management (Newman 2004) employs persuasion techniques causing the public (and not only the subject on which the persuasion is employed) to grant legitimacy and support the management of “non-productive” sectors. The recommendations regarding these sectors are comprised in principle from neoliberal paternalistic rhetoric that polices these “undisciplined” population groups (Wacquant 2012), who do not contribute for the benefit of the collective.

The collective (un)contribution in Israeli society is not described by economic concepts only, but also in national ones. The best example which reveals the representation of the national obligations of the Israeli normative subject is the report's recommendation regarding housing policy. The most interesting discussion in the report concerning this subject dealt with the thresholds of the people who are entitled to affordable housing.<sup>3</sup> One of the most important criteria is the earning capacity for “a married couple or in common-law marriage that has at least 125% appointment percentage (for both partners) in accordance with National Insurance Institute of Israel” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 231). Another criterion which enables to receive affordable housing is military or national service. While participating in national service enlarges the odds of getting the discount, an active reserve service expands these odds. These two criteria point out to the way in which the politics of collective goods allocation constructs the identity of the normative Israeli citizen by identifying the J14 protestors as people who fulfill their military service and who participate in the job market. Furthermore, the national criterion mobilizes the “old” republican narrative in the Israeli society. The republican citizenship describes the citizen's entitlement to social benefits in accordance with the his/her group's contribution to the collective goals of the Israeli state (Shafir and Peled 2002).<sup>4</sup> The old republican narrative, in the Israeli context, first and foremost relates to the subject's contribution to the Jewish collective by military service. The way in which Trajtenberg committee report defines the criteria for the entitlement to affordable housing reveals the effort to return to the republican equation by restoring the “balance” between the burden that weights on shoulders of the middle-class and the entitlements that this class deserves. Such identification excludes the ultra-orthodox Jews and Arab citizens in Israel. The exclusion of the ultra-orthodox Jews by the Trajtenberg committee report is drawn upon their lack of participation in the labor market and their unwillingness to serve in the military or to join the national service and obviously to contribute to the reserve service. The Arab citizens are also excluded by the same republican principles of military and national service. Furthermore, this exclusion expands by limiting the number of children that could help the parents to collect points raising their odds winning the discount<sup>5</sup> due to the high birth rates characterizing these populations in Israel. Consequently, normativity is represented through the signing on the republican contract with the state. Thus, the report maintains that the normative citizen “feels that he [signed an implied ‘contract’ with the state] when he fills his duties towards himself and towards the broad collective” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 31).

The normative J14 subject was also identified as an apolitical being:

“It appears that it is possible to complain about the cost of living, about the shortage of education frameworks for preschoolers, about the shortage of small apartments for rent and more, without this being interpreted as a political statement that necessarily implies a stand about the future of the Land of Israel or of a Palestinian State. Cutting this Gordian knot released energies, aspirations and hopes of an entire generation that carried the burden, conducted itself normatively, but did not find its place regarding its problems on the one hand and the erosion of the sphere of public discourse on the other hand” (Ibid: 52).

While numerous researchers pointed out that part of the neoliberal project is to empty the public space (Grinberg 2013; Ram and Filc 2013), the Trajtenberg committee report places the blame of the emptying of the public sphere (“erosion of the public discourse”) on the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although, the J14 protestor identified themselves as a-political as part of the effort to mobilize supporters and to challenge the institutionalized political discourse in Israel (Herzog 2013), the Trajtenberg committee report transformed this tactic into a claim that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict creates “artificial cleavages” within the people and obstructs the possibility of conceiving the (Jewish) people’s common grievances. In the committee report’s eyes, the separation between the public discourse and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will pave the way for the return of the public “that carries the burden” as an active actor in the public arena.

From the deliberate statement of the committee report directed at this specific target group, weakened sectors and their problems became irrelevant. By adopting the interpretation which maintained that the source of poverty is found in lack of participation in the labor market, the committee report ignored other structural factors that lead to poverty and economic distress.

## **Tyranny of the state**

In order to meet the protestor’s demand so that the state takes responsibility for its citizens, the Trajtenberg committee report had to define its outlook regarding the role of the state. The role of the state was described in the committee report “not in narrowing the role of the government but in changing the way it realizes its responsibility” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 44). It is well established that states do not lose their power and centrality in the neoliberal era, but rather change their position in relation to the market and civil society (Harvey 2005). In the context of the identification processes of the J14 movement it is essential to unfold the connotation of “state responsibility” and the perceived reasoning that was made in the committee report to explain why the state must change the way it realizes “its responsibility”?

The Trajtenberg Committee report maintains that the public no longer trusts government institutions<sup>6</sup> entrusted with protecting it from market forces. The committee report attributes this to two key factors: state’s failure to create competition because it did not “effectively” expose various economic sectors to international competition and imposed “many barriers to imports”, and the state failure due to “the existence of centralized markets and in limited competition in many economic areas” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 155). The committee report laments the state’s inadequate expansion of the neoliberal project and the government’s inability to foster competition, mainly in government sectors. As the committee report sees it, this stems from the failure to carry out neoliberal governance in two areas: the state’s inability to narrow its direct involvement in supplying services; and its inability to foster competition and enable proper functioning of the market (Yonah 2015).

Consequently, the proposed results for the described tyranny of the state should address the role of the public sector. The committee report proposes to improve the functioning of the public sector through “professional elite units that will rely on skilled and dynamic personnel who will strengthen planning, measurement, control and assessment capabilities” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 49). In effect this means a work force that does not have employment stability and that can be terminated at any time. The flexibility mechanisms (“dynamic workforce”) have a negative effect, for example, on employee benefits or collective bargaining agreements that provide long-term employment security. In other words, the committee report does not view the absence of employment security, that characterizes the predicament of the middle and lower classes, as a probable reason for the social protest, not even as a factor that impacts the cost of living of the middle-class and the living conditions of the lower classes. This rhetoric enables the committee to adopt the discourse frame of increased efficiency for the sake of development, rhetoric that is both apolitical and technical (Clarke 2008), in order to stress the principle of expanded flexibility in the public sector which up until then had been relatively protected from this approach. In effect, to instill this principle of flexibility the committee report relies on the discourse that places the blame on the public sector, by claiming that lack of dynamism is one of the main reasons for the outburst of the J14 movement, along with lack of participation of the Jewish ultra-orthodox and Arab sectors in the labor market.

The flexibility principle in the committee’s report has implication on the interpretation of the role of the state in the network of social relations: “the overall responsibility of the government for the provision of a public service, its quality and availability, will not decrease whether it chooses to provide the product itself or through an external entity” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 41). Thus, the committee report supports the provision of public service products by means of “external entities”, owing to the advantages of using this instrument for:

“improved service level, its availability and accessibility, including: the ability to maintain flexibility latitude in setting standards and selecting the executing entity; operating flexibility; advantages in the involvement of the third and private

sectors in all matters pertaining to expertise and professionalism [...] innovation and familiarity with a different perspective regarding needs and suitable ways to provide a service” (Ibid: 42).

The committee report suggest outsourcing as a solution to the diagnosis of the public sector as monopolistic and unprofessional entity. Yet again, the solutions proposed to the problems associated with the state’s responsibility are merely technical. These solutions do not include political intervention in service provision, but rather intervention in increasing efficiency through oversight and control. This views the state not as an executing entity but rather as a body with only an oversight function. In other words, besides granting legitimacy to the frequent use of outsourcing for the provision of public services, the committee report reveals its outlook regarding the role of the state with respect to civil society and the market: “The focus should be on strengthening oversight and control of services provided through outsourcing and in formulating policy guidelines required in the future, while learning, correcting and improving where possible” (Ibid: 44).

The combination of increased efficiency and flexibility of the public sector, along with the elimination of monopolistic market forces, exposes a discourse upholding the notion that competition and flexibility will increase the social welfare of the Israeli public. Not only does this discourse ignores worker employment security that is undermined daily, but it also upholds the view that service recipients are customers of the public sector (De Leonardis 2011) rather than individuals entitled to government services. Accordingly, one of the committee’s report recommendations regarding regulation states the need to “build sustainable mechanisms to promote and preserve a high level of competition in the market for the benefit of Israeli consumers” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 171). Thus, the committee’s report recommendations do not pertain to “Israeli citizens”, but rather to “Israeli consumers”. In other words, the notion that competition plays a role in promoting public welfare has to do with consumer society, not with civil society, and it is the former that is indirectly responsible for turning the wheels of the Israeli economy. This outlook views consumers as rational and responsible subjects (Clarke 2008) and public services as one of numerous competing products that operate according to market principles and oversight of their proper functioning is the responsibility of the state.

Another major responsibility of the state is perceived by the committee report as “closely adhering to fiscal rules”. Hence, the Trajtenberg committee, as the representative of state bureaucracy, declares that “the decision of the committee to maintain the budget framework means that the total budget will not increase as a result of its recommendations” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 33). While the committee report purportedly strive to expand public spending, at the same time they focus on maintaining the fiscal responsibility. This principle does not enable the committee to advocate budget framework expansion or deficit increases. Consequently, it recommends expanding public spending by cutting the defense budget (see Ibid: 33-34). However, such cuts are not sustainable in Israeli militaristic society where the defense budget always served as a bargaining chip and a stated political party agenda. While the desire to expand public spending reflects a social outlook, the committee report’s solution to implementing this recommendation is not sustainable and therefore preserves current budget allocations. Reducing poverty and inequality is subordinated to a distinctly neoliberal principle of fiscal responsibility while ignoring the cost of the Israeli-Palestine conflict as a factor which diverse resources from the rising housing cost, poverty and inequality (Svirski and Hoffman-Dishon 2015).

The neoliberal logic further resonates in the committee report through the romantization of the past in the form of the 1985 economic stabilization plan: “Thought should be given to fiscal credibility which the State of Israel acquired with great effort over 25 years, since the 1985 economic stabilization plan” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 34). This plan, that consisted of radical economic measures including price freezes, cuts in public spending and heavy layoffs, represents the turning point in the Israeli economy in its transition into a neoliberal economy.<sup>7</sup> The stabilization plan was carried out based on the “professional” knowledge of Israeli and American economists, on the backdrop of a severe inflation crisis in Israel (Grinberg 1991; Maman and Rosenhek 2008). This policy was grounded in the inclusion of the neoliberal ideological-political-economic project, with a focus on increased labor market flexibility and principles of privatization and outsourcing. In effect, this institutional legacy demarcates the options regarding new economic policy and its ability to respond to crises in civil society (Weir and Skocpol 1985). Besides delineating the boundaries of the state’s options, this path dependency also outlines the interpretive frameworks of the groups taking part in the political struggle. In this case the group is the state bureaucracy which employs the politics of “neoliberal necessity” (Maman and Rosenhek 2008). This rhetoric presents neoliberal processes, including privatization, flexibility and efficiency as inevitable, natural and evolutionary:

“The state of Israel has excelled for the most part in its evolution: from the waves of immigration and the of relinquishing Diaspora norms, the establishment of new institutions and social arrangements (the labor brigade, the kibbutz, the General Organization of Workers), the Israeli economy has become a vibrant market economy” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 23).

The committee report describes the trajectory of the development of the State of Israel as movement along a sequence of modernity stages, from a government-controlled economy to a market economy. This rhetoric mainly characterizes those promulgating neoliberal politics who present neoliberalism as a natural development towards modernization (Peck 2004), and even as a physical law of the modern economy (Harvey 2005). Framed as necessary



in order to reduce the cost of living in Israel, the state must therefore “enable market forces to do their good work” (Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change 2011: 187).

## Discussion

This paper analyzed the Trajtenberg committee report as a short-term consequence of the J14 movement and as an active actor which constructed the identity of the protestors through the interpretation of their claims. The main discourse employed by the Trajtenberg committee report is grounded in fundamental assumptions of the neoliberal paradigm. But, these assumptions are embedded in the Israeli local context of republicanism and national hegemony.

While identifying the normative subject of the J14 movement as young middle-class secular Jews who participate in the job market and contribute to the republic by doing military or national service, Trajtenberg committee excluded from the J14 collective identity the ultra-orthodox Jews and Arab citizens. Why these specific social group were identified as unworthy or abnormal by state bureaucrats? These two groups in pose a deep threat to the normative order by resisting to the neoliberal subjectification and the national hegemony. Intentionally or not, the danger that these two groups pose on the most powerful hegemonies in Israel (i.e. the neoliberal and the national) was the reason of identifying them simultaneously as the outsiders and the cause of the J14's movement problematics. Using such a rhetoric can grant the state the legitimacy to discipline those social groups in the name of “the people”. Interestingly, when the J14 movement returned to the streets in 2012, it was divided into two blocs: one bloc named itself the “social” camp and the second was called the “equal burden” camp. The latter demanded an equal participation of orthodox Jews in military and national service and dealt with their lack of participation in the job market.

The accusation strategy that was employed by the Trajtenberg committee report in order to frame the J14 movement collective identity was not restricted to national and religious identities. It also constructed the state as faulty in the problematics of the Israeli middle-class. Placing the blame on the functioning of the public sector as the spark that ignited the protest movement leads the committee experts to the implicit conclusion that neoliberal processes have not been completely institutionalized in Israeli society. If this is the case, then how can market logic be inculcated comprehensively into Israeli society? The committee reports' answer is: through public services. By increasing public sector flexibility and instituting effective regulation this market logic will gain a foothold with respect to public services. In other words, the discourse framed by the committee harnesses the state as the key agent that will inject market logic into civil life (Wacquant 2012), emphasizing the liberating experience of receiving social services based on a competitive model (Newman 2011). The demands of the protest movement are translated by the economic experts of the Trajtenberg Committee into the state's responsibility to instill market logic and principles in civil society through its social welfare policy. This logic constructs the responsibility of the state as a regulator, but also as an active agent which apply market discipline on the public sector.

The interpretation of the protest demands through the neoliberal prism enables the Trajtenberg Committee to preserve the power relations and interests embodied in the politics of the state bureaucracy, mainly as they pertain to fiscal policy. The committee members portray their interpretation of the J14 movement's demands as compatible with a broad collective interest, while in fact they translate the protestors' demands into a call to strengthen neoliberal processes in Israeli society both in policy and subjectification levels. This notion is important since the research regarding neoliberalism tend to separate political economy dimensions from identical and discursive dimensions (Clarke 2008) of the local neoliberalisms.

By subverting the analytical distinction between political and cultural outcomes of social movements I have tried to point out on the close connection between identification, framing and discursive processes with policy making and political and economic interests. To put it in other words, my effort was to uphold the claim that interpretational processes from the “cultural realm” play a significant role in local political economies. The diagnostics and problem solving process of the Trajtenberg committee are embedded each within the other. Hence, the identification of the normative Israeli subject is simultaneously constructed by and constructs the way the committee experts determine the responsibility of the Israeli state and its proposed policy.

Furthermore, classical Marxist thinkers presume that identity politics grants legitimacy to neoliberal hegemony under the capitalistic scepter (for example see Gottwein 2001). Indeed, in some cases powerful social actors, such as state bureaucrats, appropriate identity politics so they fit into the normative mold which serves those actors' interests. But, this does not mean that researchers should overlook the complexity which is the product of different cultural identities that are interwoven in local neoliberalisms. In our context, the occupation of the J14 protestors demands by the neoliberal paradigm was closely connected to the embeddedness of neoliberalism with the nationalist hegemony in Israel. This connection enabled the Trajtenberg committee to appropriates the protestors' claims against the implications of Israeli neoliberalism into a demand that promotes the Israeli neoliberal ideology and policy.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Polletta and Jasper (2001) for review on collective identities.

<sup>2</sup> For the full list of experts see page 7 in the Committee for Economic and Social Change (2011).

<sup>3</sup> For the complete discussion see pages 231-233 in the Report of the Committee for Economic and Social Change (2011).

<sup>4</sup> This principle is based on the utilitarian conception which maintains that the rights of the individual are determined by his/her utility to contribute to the collective goals (Dahan 2013)

<sup>5</sup> The limitation was done in a quite elegant manner by determining weights system that is given by points accumulation: parents will be given 10 points for each child, up to three children.

<sup>6</sup> This problem was described in the literature as “emptying of the public space” or as a “legitimacy crisis” as a result of the local neoliberal mechanisms. This crisis led Israelis to avoid participation in political life and to feel suspicious towards political institutions, particularly political parties, both the hawkish and the competing dovish parties (Grinberg 2013; Ram and Filk 2013).

<sup>7</sup> It is essential to note that the Israeli political economy was never fully socialist. As Shalev (2006) and Grinberg (1991) deduce, not all Israeli citizens were enjoying the same level of benefits and security from Israeli pre-neoliberal welfare state and worker unions. In this sense, the social benefits were granted only to a certain ethnic group.

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## **Bio**

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